



Minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers

The meeting was held at on Thursday 27 April 2017 in The Nave at St Ethelburga's, 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG. There were 45 members present, 5 more than in 2016. There were 57 apologies.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last AGM were proposed and seconded and approved by the meeting

Welcome by the President

Xanthe Clay welcomed and thanked all members attending, saying that it was “an honour to stand here as your President – you here tonight are the people who make the Guild what it is”

Announcing details of plans for regional groups she said “one thing that has always been a particular concern to the committee is how to provide a useful service to people who don't live in London”

Many regions don't have the critical mass of members to make formal events feasible, “but those are the areas where it's so important for the Guild to bring people together”

To this end, there are plans to set up regional groups to put members in touch and help organise informal events, with the intention also of building the Guild brand and strengthening the community of food professionals as a whole

INSPIRATION AWARD 2017

Xanthe also announced the shortlist for this year's Inspiration Award, which, she said, is focused “not so much on food writers as honouring the people who inspire us to write”:

Tim Baker, Head Teacher at Charlton Manor Primary School in Greenwich, London for his “outstanding and influential work making food part of everyday education”

Kate McGeevor and Forty Hall Farm, who “work closely and compassionately with their volunteers, many with mental health issues”

Callum Edge, a sixth-generation butcher based in the Wirral; “in an age of industrial meat production he's managed to keep a small throughput abattoir behind his shop and source quality local meat” and

Kalpna Woolf and 91 Ways (to build a global city) for their work bringing the people of Bristol together to share their values and heritage through the sharing of food

Report by the Secretary

Felicity Cloake reported that:

Membership currently stands at 502, up from 490 this time last year. She welcomed all new and returning members present

The Guild has had a busy year, with 8 workshops from an early-morning trip to Billingsgate to a discussion of the impact of Brexit on UK food with Bee Wilson and Professor Tim Lang, 2 workshops on Wordpress and smartphone photography and 5 regional events from Glasgow to Bristol

There were slightly fewer events than last year however, which may help explain why the number of members attending Guild events has fallen from 209 in 2015/16 to 187 in the last 12 months. She observed that this is part of a larger trend: the year before that (2014/5) the figure stood at 230. Only 80 members attended workshops in the last 12 months, down from 146 in 2013/4

More positively, however, regional events are proving increasingly popular, reflecting the diverse spread of the Guild's membership

The Write It award in association with Pink Lady has been publicised in the Week and delicious. magazine and through the work of the School Food Trust, and entries are well up on last year, though she urged members to prompt budding food writers to make their submissions before the closing date of Sunday, 30 April

The new website, thanks to the efforts of Tom Fahey, Sam Kilgour [?? anyone else on the subcommittee] and others, is set to launch this summer and will not only look much better, but will be much simpler to use, more interactive, and the ideal platform to showcase what the Guild and its individual members have to offer

The Guild's presence on social media goes from strength to strength, with 22,600 followers on Twitter and 322 on Instagram, largely thanks to Laura Washburn Hutton

Felicity thanked everyone who had made her time on the committee so enjoyable and said it had been a great privilege, and it was only with regret she was standing down early

Report by Treasurer

Laura Washburn Hutton reported:

"I'm pleased to say the past year has resulted in a surplus, a bit down on last year's but the figures are still good" Operating costs are higher across the board, the awards party cost more and a delayed invoice from 2015 was received in 2016, making a dent in the previous healthy surplus

Good news can largely be attributed to two main areas of Guild activity: sponsorship has been taken to "another level" by the subcommittee responsible, even in a difficult climate, with figures up £3,000 from the previous year ("already phenomenal") and a steady level of membership – plus a steady level of expenditure

Workshop income is healthy, despite the cost of venue hire increasing: the Guild merely seeks to cover costs rather than profit from this important area of member engagement, so prices are able to remain consistent

We are hopeful that the coming year will bring continued positive financial outcomes

Chair's Address

Kate Hawkings said she is stepping down after four years in the Chair, and 10 years on the Guild committee, noting "the world has changed enormously in that time"

The Guild is "many things to many people, our membership ranges from the extremely distinguished elder statesmen of the food world to a growing number of bright young things embarking on their careers in this precarious business. We are a motley crew and that is where our strength lies – the writing life can be a lonely business and for me the Guild first and foremost is a community and it's one I'm extremely proud to be part of"

"Like all communities we do not always agree, and we sometimes get things wrong, but together we have an excess of 20,000 years of experience between us, and that's an incredible amount of information, support, friendship, and sometimes even paid work we get from each other"

Kate admitted that "it's been a difficult year for many of us on the committee, but throughout everyone pulled together with incredible fortitude to keep the Guild on the road – I can't thank you all enough"

Kate offered special thanks to the other departing committee members, "Jayne Cross, my vice chair, for calm words and awards skills and to "Felicity for secretarial skills", and to Xanthe and Clarissa, "for their guidance and advice" saying, "in my time in the Guild I've made so many friendships on both a personal and professional level"

AOB

RESOLUTION A: PROCEDURE FOR AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

Proposed by Angela Clutton, seconded by Clarissa Hyman

To update the mechanism for how the Guild membership can vote to make amendments to the constitution.

Currently votes to make such amendments can only be made at an AGM, Special General Meeting, or by postal vote.

The proposal is for this to also be possible by electronic vote.

The current Rule 39 reads:

'39. This Constitution and these Rules may be added to, repealed or amended by Resolution at any Annual or Special General Meeting or by postal vote of the members, provided that no such Resolution shall be deemed to have been passed unless it be carried by 60 (sixty) per cent of those voting.'

If this resolution is approved, the new Rule 39 to read:

'39. This Constitution and these Rules may be added to, repealed or amended by Resolution at any Annual or Special General Meeting or by postal vote or by electronic vote of the members, provided that no such Resolution shall be deemed to have been passed unless it be carried by 60 (sixty) per cent of those voting.'

Angela said this "very simply change" would make amending the procedure for amending the constitution "much more modern and niftier".

Passed [NB a formal count was not taken]

RESOLUTION B: WAIVER OF ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR ELECTED COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Proposed by Felicity Cloake, seconded by Kate Hawkings

To waive the subscription fee for Committee members in recognition of the vast amount of time and effort they expend in the service of the Guild, often at the expense of paid work, by amending clause 8 of the Guild's constitution.

Clause 8 currently reads:

'8. The annual subscription of the Guild shall be the same for all ordinary members. The subscription rate will be decided on by the Committee and set at the Annual General Meeting.

Members aged 75 years and over at the date of renewal (31 December) will be eligible for Senior Membership with a 50% discount on the subscription, based on a minimum of ten years unbroken membership.

Members aged 80 years and over at the date of renewal (31 December) will be eligible for free honorary Emeritus Membership, based on a minimum of ten years unbroken membership.

The Committee reserves the right to offer Honorary Membership at its discretion.'

If this resolution is approved, the new clause 8 to read:

'8. The annual subscription of the Guild shall be the same for all ordinary members, with the exception of elected Committee members who shall be eligible for free membership for the duration of their service on the Committee, as determined by Committee membership on the date of renewal (31 December).

The subscription rate will be decided on by the Committee and set at the Annual General Meeting.

Members aged 75 years and over at the date of renewal (31 December) will be eligible for Senior Membership with a 50% discount on the subscription, based on a minimum of ten years unbroken membership.

Members aged 80 years and over at the date of renewal (31 December) will be eligible for free honorary Emeritus Membership, based on a minimum of ten years unbroken membership.

The Committee reserves the right to offer Honorary Membership at its discretion.'

Felicity said that, as she was leaving the committee, she felt able to bring this resolution without the prospect of personal gain, but that she had been surprised by just how much work the Committee did and felt it ought to be recognised in some way, given that it inevitably was sometimes at the expense of paid work

Rosemary Moon said that many present had served on the committee in previous years and, though she understood "Felicity's shock at the work involved... but one of the reasons you join the Guild committee is to give your talents to the Guild as well as to make contacts"

She also worried that the prospect of free membership might encourage people to join the committee and not turn up to meetings, and whether it might put them off continuing with paying membership after their committee term was up

Susan Wolk proposed that "Guild committee members not pay for any workshops either in recognition for the very great amount of work that goes into them"

Laura Washburn Hutton responded that "workshops are offered at cost price, and costed per head, so I don't think that would be feasible from the treasurer's point of view"

Susan Wolk suggested in response that workshops could be sponsored instead, and Kate Hawkings noted that "sponsorship is an extremely difficult thing to organise in the current climate" so this would just make more work for the Committee

Patrick Anthony asked if it would not be reasonable for members to be able to claim expenses for Committee work, and Kate Hawkings explained that they already do

Jane Suthering pondered whether "£85 was so much of an expense that it would make such a difference to the members concerned"; Felicity Cloake said that from her point of view, it was a significant lump sum

Jane Suthering asked if such an amendment would not also necessitate the changing of the AGM rules that members must be "fully paid-up" to attend

Xanthe Clay read out the following email from Richard Ehrlich, who was unable to attend [Jonathan I thought I must have this email but I can't find it to precis so maybe not]

Rosemary Moon said that "the last thing the Guild wants is to struggle for committee members, but it's interesting that it's come up now"

Kate Hawkings said she felt it would be "a small token of acknowledgement" by the membership

Xanthe Clay observed that the point was made that work for the Guild should never come before paid work, but the reality is it does, and Joan Ransley suggested that being on the Committee "also brings paid work"

Jane Suthering enquired about the status of special officers – should they not also qualify for such a benefit? Kate Hawkings responded that special offers in general do less work, and the hope is that they will join the committee proper at the next opportunity

Dan Schickentanz observed that "if there is a ratio of 10 people wanting a job on the committee, they should pay for it, if it's the other way round, then they should be paid"

The motion was passed [again, no formal count I don't think]

WORKSHOPS

Susan Wolk suggested that the reason numbers for workshops had fallen was because they were now too expensive: “when I first joined they were free; I wouldn’t expect them to be free now but I don’t go to many because they’re unaffordable. I’d like to suggest they lower the price, with the result that more people would attend”

Kate Hawkings responded that one of the reasons workshop attendance were down were because there were fewer workshops

Kate explained that the workshops team need to make the workshops break even, and some are even subsidised to some extent because we think that would be good for members: “it would be extremely irresponsible for us to subsidise them to a greater degree” because most of them are in London, and it’s “not really fair for other members. The fact is that workshops cost a lot to put on”

Susan Wolk said she felt that “a lot of the workshops are disguised PR events, promoting particular companies”, and when this was the case the companies concerned could sponsor it themselves allowing members to attend for free.

Kate Hawkings asked for specific examples

Judy Jackson said she thought it was hard “to talk about the workshops as a generality” as some of them were an hour and drink and a chat, and some were full days with “a wonderful lunch, or a workshop like the Wordpress one which is expensive and you know you would pay a lot more for elsewhere”

Susan Wolk wondered if it might be an idea “to level the prices, raise some of them and bring some of them down?”

Xanthe Clay responded that many of them are priced per person, so that wouldn’t work, but that it was certainly a topic that needed further discussion

Close

Xanthe Clay thanked everyone again for coming, saying “I think we can all agree that the Guild is stronger than ever, listening to Felicity and Laura’s reports was quite heartwarming, and that’s down to you, you’re the people who come to the AGM and speak up, so thank you”

Xanthe also thanked the committee, “some of the brightest voices in food writing with real pzazz, they sparkle, wow!” and said much of this sparkle was down to Kate’s leadership

She praised Kate Hawkings’ “ability to get stuff done and the tact and elegance in which she moves a committee meeting along! She’s done so much for the Guild and been inspirational in so many ways and brought fresh light and fresh talent to everything.”

Xanthe presented Kate with a gift of an engraved wooden board and the AGM gave her three cheers

Kate Hawkings thanked everyone very much for their good wishes, urging them to have “a good time – and remember, the Awards are on 22nd June!”